



The 2013 maize growing year may have got off to a poor start, but conditions have picked up and prospects for this year's crop are looking more promising. The uptake of maize seed increased slightly this season, as farmers seek to avoid forage stock shortages.

## Rise in demand for early vigour varieties

**S**eedbed conditions throughout the country were broadly spilt by an East/West divide and unusually, soils in the West tended to be drier, compared with those in the East.

Mark Smyth of Agrii says some growers will have used a pre-emergence herbicide with considerable success, given the timely spell of rain which followed application in several regions.

However, soils in other areas proved too dry for chemicals to be fully effective. He says this latter group in particular will be well advised to opt for a post-emergence herbicide treatment, as maize plants will not thrive under competition, he points out.

### Four leaf

"It is best to wait until the two to four leaf stage, before embarking on a post-emergence treatment," says Mr Smyth.

"One example would be Calaris, which offers both contact and residual activity and will tackle a broad spectrum of weeds. This would in-



clude annual meadow grass, fat hen, knotgrass, chickweed and redshank. It will also combat nightshade, which can be a particular problem in maize.

"If wild oats are present in significant numbers, it may be worth preparing a tank mix of Calaris, combined with Samson Extra. The main aim should be to deal with spring-germinating weeds before they become stronger and more difficult to eradicate."

Maize crops in Mr Smyth's region – the South West – have been drilled into seedbeds in

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**GRAHAM RAGG**

optimum conditions, which should help to get them get off to a good start, he adds.

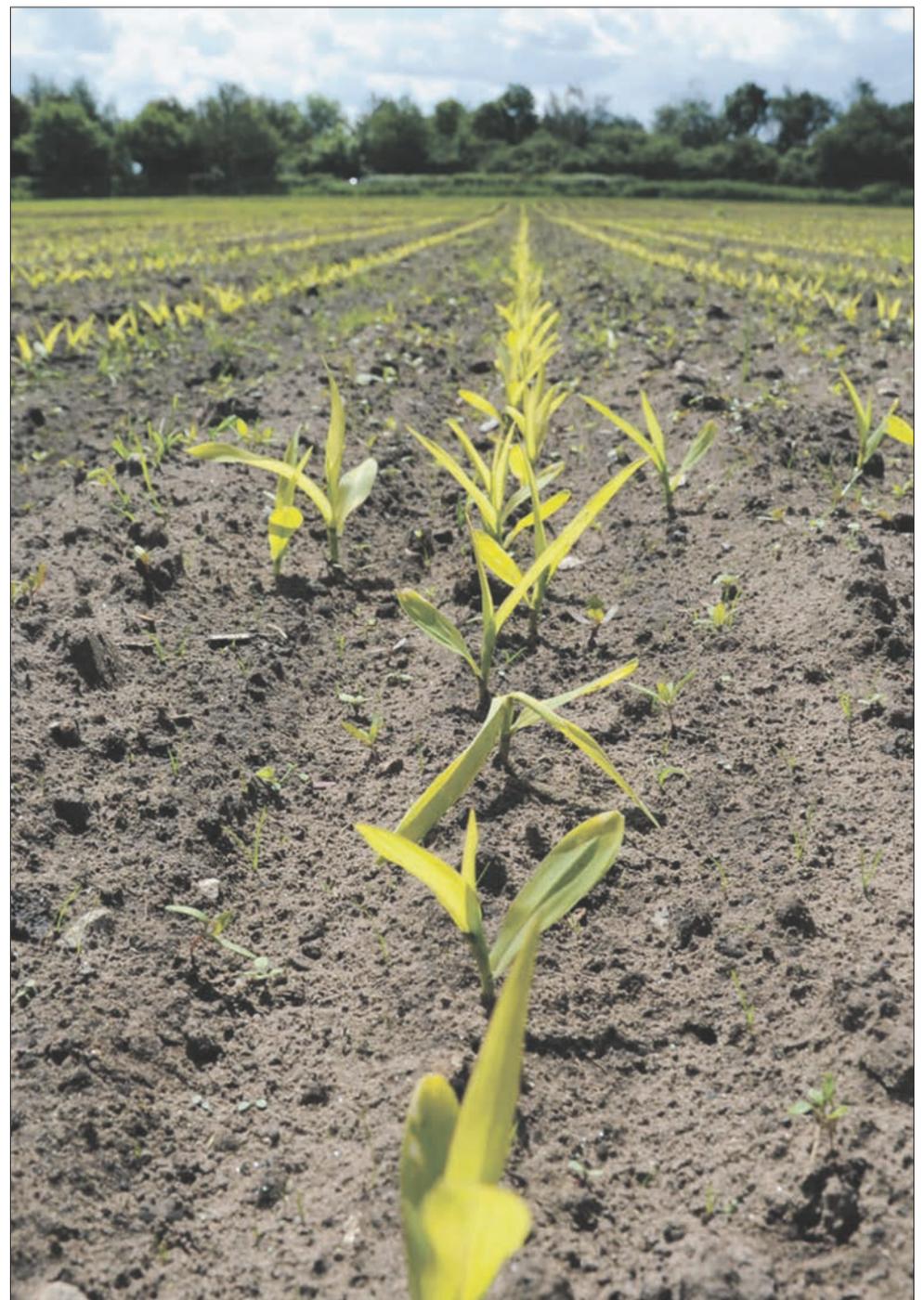
When it comes to crop nutrition, extra care will be needed on most farms, as deficiencies may be widespread. This is largely due to the heavy rainfall, which resulted in nitrogen and phosphate being leached through the soil, out of the reach of maize plant roots.

The general advice is to check soil nutrient reserves and err on the side of caution. However, phosphate mobility in the soil should be reasonable, because of the warmer temperatures experienced during late April and early May. A number of growers have seen good results from the use of starter fertilisers and they are fast becoming a routine element of crop management.

Graham Ragg of Mole Valley Farmers notes most of his clients used about 123kg/ha (50kg/acre) of Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) at sowing. Others have adopted a policy of placing a combination of micro-nutrients to one side of the seed, at a rate of approximately 24kg/ha (10kg/acre).

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When it comes to crop nutrition, extra care will be needed on most farms, as deficiencies may be widespread.



"Maize which is showing signs of nutrient deficiency can benefit from a foliar spray later in the season, but the idea should be to correct soil deficiencies in advance of sowing, or at the drilling stage," he says.

### Early vigour

Drilling date differences have been shown to be less marked this year, compared with 2012, as growers were under far less pressure to get their crops sown. In general, maize under plastic went in around the second week in April, with maize grown in the open following later on in the month.

In the light of last year's struggles, early vigour has become an important feature for many growers. However, early flowering, early ripening and silage quantity and quality are also top of the agenda, according to Francis Dunne of Field Options. He picks out Recolt KWS, Kentaurus (KWS) and Activate (Limagrain) as three potential star performers for harvest 2013.

"Early vigour can be desirable, but there is no correlation between this attribute and date of harvest," says Mr Dunne. "The benefits of

### EYESPOT

GROWERS should be on the lookout for eyespot infection, later in the season says Mole Valley Farmers Graham Ragg.

"Routine checks should be made, once plants reach around 50cm in height," says Mr Ragg.

"A serious infestation of eyespot can cause losses of up to 70 per cent of the crop. It has become more prevalent over the past few years, especially in south west England. Eyespot starts out with yellow spots about the size of a pin head on the leaf, but if left unchecked, the spots will eventually join up and the leaf will die, with a highly detrimental effect on starch levels.



"I have known maize with eyespot infection to be virtually destroyed over a period of just 10 days, so an appropriate fungicide treatment – or even two treatments – may be necessary if the disease is found to be present," he says.

early season vigour may be lost, if the plant fails to ripen in time to fit in with the weather window and the next crop.

"My customers are looking to fill their clamps with a high yielding maize that will feed out well

to their livestock. In any case, early vigour tends to be a common trait in varieties which are selected to be grown in marginal areas where seasons are shorter, compared with the rest of the country."